

Apple, Facebook, others defy authorities, notify users of secret data demands

By Craig Timberg, Washington Post

Major U.S. technology companies have largely ended the practice of quietly complying with investigators' demands for e-mail records and other online data, saying that users have a right to know in advance when their information is targeted for government seizure.

This increasingly defiant industry stand is giving some of the tens of thousands of Americans whose Internet data gets swept into criminal investigations each year the opportunity to fight in court to prevent disclosures. Prosecutors, however, warn that tech companies may undermine cases by tipping off criminals, giving them time to destroy vital electronic evidence before it can be gathered.

Fueling the shift is the industry's eagerness to distance itself from the government after last year's disclosures about National Security Agency surveillance of online services. Apple, Microsoft, Facebook and Google all are updating their policies to expand routine notification of users about government data seizures, unless specifically gagged by a judge or other legal authority, officials at all four companies said. Yahoo announced similar changes in July.

Read the whole story